

Lightning

One person was killed and two were injured by lightning in Arkansas in 2004.

A 17-year-old boy was killed by lightning at Conway (Faulkner Co.). He was walking across a church parking lot on his way to a school bus stop when he was struck.

The injuries occurred at Bentonville (Benton Co.) and at Dennard (Van Buren Co.).



In the picture: In 2004, lightning struck people in Arkansas on April 21st (in Conway), May 13th (in Bentonville) and June 18th (at Dennard).

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There is a flicker of light in the distance followed by a rumble of thunder. Yet in many cases, outdoor activities will resume until the rain begins. Given how people react, lightning is probably not feared as much as tornadoes...but it is more deadly. Nationwide, more than 70 people are killed by lightning each year.

You can think of lightning as part of an atmospheric battery. It is generated due to the magnetic attraction between the base of a storm cloud (negative charge) and the ground (positive charge). However, to go from cloud to ground, lightning must travel through air...a poor conductor of electricity.



The resistance of the air makes it difficult for lightning to go from point A to point B. Because of this, lightning will tend to go the shortest distance possible...and will strike tall objects such as buildings, antennas and trees. But, since lightning is fighting air to make a connection, it has been known to hit targets randomly...and nowhere near the core of a storm.



Fact: Lightning has been known to strike up to 10 miles away from its parent thunderstorm!

Given that lightning can strike at a distance, waiting until it rains before seeking shelter is probably not a good idea. The National Weather Service realizes this, and has created "Lightning Safety Awareness Week" to educate people of the dangers of lightning. To find out more, go to:

<http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/>